

## What can I do to feel better if I have a virus like a cold or the flu?

- Get plenty of rest.
- Drink plenty of fluids.
- Avoid very dry air. Use a vaporizer if needed.
- Avoid smoking and smoky areas.
- Do not try to stop coughs that are mucus-producing.
- Ask your doctor or pharmacist about over-the-counter decongestants for nasal congestion.

Check with your doctor or pharmacist for ideas that can make you feel better and breathe easier.

## Remember to see your doctor.

Your doctor cares about you and your family. Many illnesses have similar symptoms. A doctor needs to see you to find out what is making you sick.



For more information about antibiotic resistance, contact:



**Section for Communicable Disease Prevention**  
**P.O. Box 570**  
**Jefferson City, MO 65102-0570**  
**Telephone: 573/751-6113**  
**Website: [www.dhss.state.mo.us](http://www.dhss.state.mo.us)**

Alternate forms of this publication for persons with disabilities may be obtained by contacting the Missouri Department of Health & Senior Services at the number listed above.  
Hearing impaired citizens telephone  
1-800-735-2966.

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# ANTIBIOTICS



# ANTIBIOTIC RESISTANCE

## What causes infections?

Antibiotics are not always the best medicine when someone in your family is sick. It depends on what's causing the illness.

Two kinds of germs cause most infections: bacteria and viruses. **Antibiotics only kill bacteria, not viruses.**

Using antibiotics when you *do not* need them can cause antibiotics not to work when you *do* need them.

## When do antibiotics work?

Antibiotics may be used successfully to treat illnesses caused by bacteria. These include:

- ☐ Strep throat (a throat culture is the only way to determine if you have strep throat)
- ☐ Bacterial ear and sinus infections
- ☐ Bacterial pneumonia

## When don't antibiotics work?

Antibiotics **do not** cure viral illnesses like:

- ☐ Colds, chest colds and most coughs. Yellow or green mucus in the nose and fluid in the middle ear can be caused by viruses. Yellow or green mucus does not mean you need an antibiotic.
- ☐ Sore throats from colds, influenza and other viruses.
- ☐ Influenza

## How can you and your doctor work together to use antibiotics effectively and appropriately?

### Please DO:

- Be sure to see the doctor and ask if your illness or your child's is caused by bacteria or a virus.
- Remember antibiotics can help cure bacterial infections, but they don't work for illnesses caused by viruses.
- Share questions or concerns you have about antibiotics with your doctor or pharmacist.
- If given an antibiotic, take or give it exactly as the doctor has instructed.
- Take or give the antibiotic until it is gone, even if you or your child feels better before finishing the medication.

### Please DON'T:

- Do not expect or insist on getting an antibiotic if you or your child has a viral illness.
- Do not ask your doctor to prescribe antibiotics over the phone.
- Never share antibiotics with others or use leftover antibiotics.

## What is antibiotic resistance?

Each time we take antibiotics, we kill the weakest bacteria causing the infection. But some bacteria can change to defend themselves against the antibiotic. These germs are called "resistant." They can continue to live and grow even after an antibiotic is taken. A resistant infection is harder to treat.

Resistant bacteria emerge because of misuse of antibiotics.

## Why do we care about antibiotic resistance?

Antibiotic resistance is a growing problem in Missouri and throughout the country. If we do not take action to prevent resistance, we put ourselves, our friends and our loved ones at risk. Resistant bacteria can spread to others and cause serious illness.

As bacteria continue to develop resistance, it becomes harder to find antibiotics strong enough to kill them. Stronger medicines can cost more or have more side effects. Scientists will continue to make stronger antibiotics, but bacteria will continue to find ways to survive.

## What can you do to prevent infection?

Using antibiotics wisely **can prevent** resistant infections. You can also avoid getting sick in the first place by:

- Washing your hands frequently.
- Using separate eating and drinking utensils for each family member.
- Covering your nose and mouth when you sneeze.
- Cleaning cutting boards and cooking foods properly.
- Getting plenty of rest and eating healthy foods.
- Getting immunized. Ask your doctor about flu, pneumococcal and other shots that protect you from disease.

